MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, LONDON.

Address

TO

THE STUDENTS,

DELIVERED AT THE CLOSE OF THE SESSION, 1882-3,

BY

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VISITOR.

"The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular Theological doctrines."

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ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

It is now my office to offer you a few parting words. On a former occasion I dwelt on what seemed to me of primary importance, the conduct of worship; and to-day I would supplement what I then said by a few remarks on the subject of preaching.

The question has of late been often discussed, whether the work of the pulpit has not been to a considerable extent superseded by other agencies of human culture. Let me say, at the outset, that I do not think so. When I read the newspapers, speeches in Parliament and elsewhere, and most of the books that are published, it seems to me that, so far from the occupation of the preacher being gone, his work is as great and necessary as it ever was. The subjects with which they deal, the motives to which they appeal, differ for the most part from those with which he has chiefly to do; and even so far as he and they may occupy the same ground, there is no reason why he and they should not work harmoniously together. Nor can I think that the best sermons of recent times can be regarded as not fully holding their own as compared with those of former days. My appreciation of Massillon, Bossuet, Jeremy Taylor, Barrow,

Robert Hall, does not render me dissatisfied with the sermons of Newman, Maurice, Robertson, Stanley, Caird, Liddon, and some that are more familiar to us, including the recently published volume by our revered friend, Mr. Thom. Dean Stanley, confining himself to the Established Churches of England and Scotland—for large-minded and large-hearted as he was, he was a very thorough-going churchman,—and commending especially the sermons of Newman, Arnold, Robertson, Mozley, and Caird, gives to Robertson the first place among modern preachers, and to Caird's sermon on "Religion in Common Life" the first place among modern sermons. For my own part, however, I am inclined to think that for a long time there has been no nobler utterance from the pulpit, than the sermon which, on leaving Oxford, he himself preached from the text: "If thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

For models of excellence in this department of your ministry, I venture to think, gentlemen, that you need not go far back; but if any of you should find your congregations comparing the preaching of the present disadvantageously with that of the past, and should remind you of an often-quoted saying of Sir Roger de Coverley, you might gratify their predilection by a course of Tillotson.

"The simple fact that the pulpit exists, that all over this country the people are waiting to hear a sermon on Sundays, assures," as Emerson has said, "that opportunity which is inestimable to young men, students of theology. The existence of the Sunday, and the pulpit waiting for a weekly sermon, give them the very conditions, the πού στῶ they want."

The people wait so steadily and in such numbers nowhere else, at no halls of science, at no place of amusement, whatever they may say sometimes about the pulpit's dulness. What is this waiting a sign of? It is a sign of the possession of a religious nature, of the reality of religion, of religious wants, of relations with the invisible, which, before all things, require to be put right and kept right. It was a saying of Pythagoras that "we are at our best when walking towards the Gods;" so those whom we address from the pulpit are at their best; and we should be at our best in addressing them. When we speak to them, both they and we are fresh from our communion with the Most High; and if at any time they are receptive of the loftier aspects of truth and goodness, it must surely be then, when the holiest desires and affections have thus been quickened within them.

If it were not for this natural piety of the human heart, how could we presume to think that we could interest the same people week by week and year by year? No mere learning or eloquence or speculative ingenuity could do it. But there are old things that are ever new, as the light of morning, and the unfolding life of spring; and because the services of religion are quickening to faith and hope and devout feeling, and bring us nearer to our Father in heaven, they will have about them a perennial interest; the people will continue to wait for the Sunday worship and sermon; and to the minister, growing old in his work, may be applied the words of Dante:

> "Then shall thy feet by heartiness of will
> Be so o'ercome, they not alone shall feel
> No sense of labour,—but delight much more
> Shall wait them, urged along their upward way."

We see, then, our calling, brethren. It is to minister to the spiritual wants of men by agencies of the most *direct*

kind. There are indirect agencies which are sometimes more effectual than the direct; but these we share with all earnest and good men. It is for us to speak of God, of Christ, of immortality,—to look at events and all things on their divine side, to appeal to the spirit of God in the human soul, and to hold up before men the heavenly mirror in which alone they can behold their true selves.

It might seem as if to undertake such an office implied a consciousness of having ourselves attained that to which we would lead others; but if these were the only terms on which we could enter the ministry, I know not how we could enter it at all. We preach what we *wish* to be, not what we are; and if our sermons have any power, it must be often rather from our sympathy with weakness than from the strength which is already ours. *Two deep yearnings certainly we ought to have—one the yearning after what is divine, the other a yearning towards our fellow-men.* If we have not both of these, we are unquestionably out of place; but if we have them, we have a qualification which, with such aids as we shall naturally be led to seek, may enable us to be of some service, though we should feel ourselves to be among "the least of apostles."

You may reasonably ask whether, in matters of mere detail, a somewhat lengthened ministry has not suggested hints which might be useful to beginners. Premising that I have by no means found the old proverb, "practice makes perfect," applicable to preaching, I will briefly mention some of the main points that occur to me.

As to manner of delivery, I would say, be simple and natural. In speaking in a large building, it is hardly possible to be quite natural; but be as natural as you can. Avoid conventional earnestness. To myself at least, nothing

more spoils preaching than that. We all know how monotonous the professional tone becomes, how different from the variety of nature. The born orator does not need artificial aids, and my belief is, that he who is not a born orator is better without them. So far as my observation goes, those who have aimed at rhetorical effect, or paid much attention to manner, have not, as a rule, *worn* well. And this agrees with the advice of some who might be considered most competent to teach the art of speaking. Mr. John James Tayler told me that he consulted the distinguished actor, Mr. Phelps, on this subject, with a view to the students of Manchester New College. The only advice was, "Let the young men *feel* what they are preaching about, and open well their mouths." So when a Scotch minister sought counsel from John Kemble as to reading the Bible, the answer was, "Sir, when you read the sacred Scriptures, or any other book, never think *how* you read, but *what* you read."

In regard to sermons, they should have such a symmetry in them that every part may have a bearing on the rest, so that there may be in them an accumulative interest and force. I have heard sermons that seemed to me little more than a stringing together of striking things; but with me this evident striving after effect defeats its own object, and I find myself asking what has this or that to do with the main train of thought. Socrates said that "every discourse ought to be a living creature, having its own body, and head, and feet; there ought to be a middle, beginning, and end, agreeable to one another and the whole." Such a living creature cannot fail to make more real impression than any mere display of jewels. But there is one point on which I think we should lay more stress than we do, I mean on

illustration. To the young and the less cultivated, and indeed to most of us, listening to abstract truths and principles, however ably set forth, is rather dull work, from the want of distinctness of impression. Who is there of us who has not noticed how the flagging attention of an audience has been reawakened by some apposite example? Their very faces seem to say, Now we understand what you have been speaking about, and it comes home to us. Those who have most succeeded in getting hold of the public mind have not neglected this requirement of hearers. I am not asking you to cultivate an art of popularity, but to supply a deficiency which would impair your power of accomplishing the object you have in view. A statement and argument without illustration are a soul without a body, and seem to imply that the speaker himself has no very clear idea as to how what he is teaching should be applied.

In considering what might be useful to you, I would not be regarded as criticizing your own early efforts as preachers; for of the ten sermons delivered by you during the last three days I have had the opportunity of hearing only eight: but I knew a young minister forty years ago from whom my ideas of the species are mainly formed. His early sermons were long ago consigned to the fire, with the consolation of hoping that they might have been steps to something better; but I recollect that often when he began a sermon, it would not have been easy to tell where he would get to before the end—that he went over a great deal of ground—and that, through his very immaturity, he sometimes "rushed in where angels fear to tread." He was not like the vestal virgins, who were first taught, then practised what they had learnt, and then became teachers, but was called to the care of a large congregation at the age of twenty-two.

If I could go back to that young minister of forty years ago, I should give him advice which perhaps might not have been the most acceptable to him. I should say, Take for the most part simple, practical subjects; seek more than a "bowing acquaintance with your texts;" try to be the medium of a wisdom superior to your own rather than aim at originality; and quote freely the best that has been said on the matter before you, acknowledging, of course, that you are so doing. It is no fault of yours, gentlemen, that experience is not your strong point at present. But it *will* be a strong point with you as with us all; it will give new meaning to old texts, render you less dependent on what you have learnt from others, touch you more and more with the pathetic aspects of human life, and carry on your education to the end of your days. Of completeness we will not speak in this world. The deepening lines in your faces and in your hearts will have something corresponding to them in every sermon you preach. It was a saying of Henry Ware, that "there are some duties of the ministry which no man seems capable of fully performing till he has met affliction."

In the memoir of Richard Cobden, there is a remark, the truth of which we must all have felt, viz., how much the *personality* of a speaker has to do with the influence of what he says. There are gifted men who have about them a power and a charm which strike and win us at once; but there is another kind of personality, hardly less effectual, which may be acquired by steady faithful service and by long-tried sympathy, gaining by degrees esteem for character and warm personal affection. The second of these two kinds of personality you may at least hope for in time. It is founded on genuine work, and ascertained worth; and it

gathers around it a respect and attachment and trust which are more than eloquence. A native Indian said, "I love to feel where words come from." When you can pronounce on the bride and bridegroom a blessing which has been growing from their infancy, and when, as you minister at the grave, the mourners feel that their lost one was to you almost as to themselves, it is not so much your words to which they listen as to your very self.

There are some who think that in order to reach men of the world we must speak as much as possible from their point of view, and in order to do so must throw ourselves into the press and bustle of life. It was said a little while ago that a minister among us would be greatly improved as a preacher by taking part in two or three contested elections. Doubtless for a certain style of preaching this would be an excellent preparation; but it is not the style which I can commend to you. It is true that if we are to bring religion to bear on the duties and business and relations of daily life, we must know what those to whom we minister are thinking and feeling and doing during the week. But we must never forget that we have to do with human nature and human wants from the upper side. One of the most active and busy and large-minded men whom I have ever known told me, that what he most valued religious services for was, that they lifted him out of his ordinary mood. He wished his minister not to descend to his level, but to lift him above it into realms of ideal excellence, into fellowship with prophets and saints, and into communion with "the secret source of every precious thing." A minister should labour in season and out of season; but no small part of his labours should be in privacy for public ends. I can say with the good Quaker, John Woolman, that experience has taught me the

value of "inward stillness." But I am quite as much *with* my congregation when I am considering in my study what I can say that will be of use to them, as when I am sitting with them at a dinner table or standing among them at an "at home." We talk playfully of our "sanctum," as a place where we wish to be undisturbed; but there is another sense in which it should be a "sanctum" to us,—a meeting-place with the Father of our spirits, and with "the great dead and their great thoughts."

It is a mistake for a minister to be everywhere, and do everything. In most instances it is, too, I think, well for him to be on his guard against letting even his visions of the church of the future, and his interest in the signs of the times and in general public movements, allure him too much from the care of his own flock. Let him stick to his work, and try to bring good times to his own people and his own neighbourhood. Let us take care of the church of the present, and the church of the future will take care of itself. Old Latimer said, in his celebrated sermon on the "Plough," "I would that all men would look to their duty, as God hath called them, and then we should have a flourishing Christian commonweal." So I am inclined sometimes to say, would that every minister would attend to his own congregation, for then we should have flourishing Christian churches. In preaching, as in everything else, wide allowance should, of course, be made for individuality. None of us can do our best if we allow ourselves to be cramped by stereotyped patterns. As to the character of a sermon, and the range of subjects, and the office of the ministry, there are no hard and fast lines by which individuals should be bound. It could only be loss for a Bishop Butler to try to be like Jeremy Taylor, or a Jeremy Taylor like Bishop

Butler. Nothing more tends to efface the personality on which so much depends than neglect of the gift that is in us. We must have regard to that if we would do our best. When a good minister dies, we ask who can fill his place? It may be that no one can; but there are many who, by filling a place of their own for which God has fitted them, can do better than fill a place which has been filled already, and in which the faithful minister has perhaps finished his work.

It might seem as if what I have said about personality and individuality reduces the importance of some other things I have said; and this is so, but not more than I myself wish it to do. I do not believe that there is only one type of ministerial usefulness; and if in some respects you can do more and better in accordance with some other type than that which I have set before you, then I would say, do the best and most you can in your own way. If we are not ourselves deeply interested in what we are preaching, we shall not interest others, but shall be like that minister of whom Mr. Spurgeon said that "he would make a good martyr, for he would be sure to burn well—he was so dry." No living ministry can fail to be affected in its methods by that great wave of new influences which has been latterly flowing over this country and over the most enlightened parts of the globe,—partly from the progress of natural science, partly from a more free and thorough investigation of Biblical questions, and partly from the larger extent in which humanity is felt to be religion in practice, and the moral test is applied to all subjects connected with religion.

The all-important thing with all of us is, that we should realise what our true work is, and the chief means by which we are to accomplish it. It is, not so much to instruct as to

inspire; and the instrument with which we are mainly to work is the inspiration which we ourselves receive, the renewal of our spirits day by day. This inspiration may come to us through the sublimity of the subjects of which we treat, through the greatness of the object we have in view, through our sympathy with mankind in their sins and infirmities and sorrows, through the groans of our own nature struggling out of the weaknesses which hinder us on every side, through the earnest expectation of the creature waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, through the quiet in which we come to our better selves, and through habitual communion with the holiest souls. But though there are many streams by which inspiration may flow, we shall resort most of all to Him who is its infinite source. It did not so come to Christ while he went about doing good as to render unnecessary his seasons apart, alone with his own heart and with God!

I should not like to close this address without acknowledging that the longer I live, the more am I convinced that we should rather seek a closer alliance than break with the piety of the past. In a sermon by Rufus Ellis, which I have just received, he points out how comparatively poor our Sunday services would be without "the old sacred books, the old religious speech so enriched by the use of Christian centuries, the old symbols, the old sacraments, the old benedictions." The longer I live, the more am I persuaded, with Dean Stanley, that in "the religion of Christ better and better understood, in the mind and words of Christ more and more perceived," lie the best hope and security for the religious progress and welfare of mankind. Most heartily do I echo the recent testimony, in the same sense, of the Senior Visitor of this

College.* It is no uncommon thing for ministers, as they grow older, to bear such testimony with increased emphasis. We are in no danger of preaching Christ in any narrow and exclusive way; but I feel more and more that in him are gathered into a focus the scattered beams by which, in various methods and in all times, God has borne witness to his relation to mankind.

I have said that I think our best recent sermons will bear comparison with the best of former days; but there is one sermon with which no others can at all be compared. It was probably not, as you know, all delivered on a single occasion, though from its brevity it might have been. It is shorter than an ordinary sermon, but as a body of practical divinity, has never had its like. We cannot doubt that it lost rather than gained through its reporters; and yet taking it as it stands, I can never read the Sermon on the Mount without fresh wonder at its fulness of grace and wisdom. That so much should have been said in so brief a compass, without becoming a mere code of laws and losing its life and life-giving power, is indeed a miracle of speech. It may well be a satisfaction to think that, while millions of sermons will be preached and forgotten, the one sermon, which is richer in its fruits than all the rest put together, will continue to be read in private and in the churches, and

* "During my long ministry, extending now over nearly 55 years, I have seen life under very various aspects, and in very different conditions, and all my observation makes it more certain to me that there is no blessing which can be conferred on any one that is at all comparable to a true and living faith in Christ, and I often wonder how many are able to bear up and get along through life without the strength and consolation which it affords. I know that I could not."—*Address of Rev. W. Gaskell on the Religious Education of the Young*, delivered on Sunday, April 8th, 1883, at Manchester, in the Upper Brook Street School-room.

that the name of its preacher will "remain among the posterities" to win successive generations to goodness and to God.

Gentlemen, I have now only to bid those of you who have completed your studies at Manchester New College a hearty farewell as students, with the prospect, in which I rejoice, of meeting you soon again as brother-ministers; and to express to those of you, whose preliminary studies are to be continued, the hope that after your well-earned rest you may return with renewed vigour of body and mind to the increased advantages of your new Collegiate life as residents in this Hall, which, under the direction and care of my friend, Professor Morley, has already become to you so much like a College-home.

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